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ABSTRACT

The American Indian's education as it used to be was one in which he was instructed by indirect instruction via group participation, by observation, and by individualized teaching for purposes of promoting a smooth functioning tribe. Indian education used to be a life sustaining force which was participative and dynamic, involving the total community at every level of community life, every day, all day long. Today the present Canadian education system does not serve the Indian people's needs, as evidenced by current statistics relative to Indian: unemployment (over 58 percent); lack of constructive outlets (over 40 percent of all prison inmates); poor health; social and family disability; discrimination and prejudice. In the world of the future, the Indian people want to determine their own education; they want teachers who will be: (1) of the particular tribe they are teaching; (2) thoroughly knowledgeable about the past and present of the particular community, the particular tribe, and other tribes, and immigrant peoples of this country; (3) knowledgeable about peoples and cultures of other countries; (4) fluently bilingual and specially trained in teaching a second language, whether French or English; (5) able to use the human and physical resources of the community and recognize that the school is of the community, to be used by the community. (JC)

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MONOGRAPH NO. ONE

INDIAN EDUCATION:
THE WORLD AS IT WAS
THE WORLD AS IT IS
THE WORLD AS WE WANT IT TO BE

by

CLIVE LINKLATER

This address was presented by Clive Linklater of the National Indian Brotherhood at the first Canadian conference on teacher education programs for native people held at the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, in October 1973.

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The purpose of this monograph is to share information and ideas associated with Indian and northern education.

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The World As It Was
The World As It Is
The World As We Want It To Be

by

Clive Linklater
National Indian Brotherhood

The World As It Was

In the Indian world as it was, the people performed many tasks necessary to the smooth-functioning of the tribe. These tasks were taught and passed on by the observation method (watch-and-do), by indirect instruction and by individual teaching. Formalized group instruction in a building labelled "A School" did not take place.

But, instruction - learning - teaching did go on. It went on formally and informally. At some point in tribal affairs, every member filled the role of a teacher-learner. And, various individuals filled and carried out specific instructional tasks at specified times.

Teaching-learning was a constant on-going requisite shared by the young and the old -- the male and the female.

In the world as it was, the Indian people had a system of education that, in today's terms, parallelled individualized instruction, tutorials, evening classes, week-end classes, daily lessons, field trips.

But, the Indian tribes did not have that strange whiteman's institution - a building labelled "A School"! And the Indian tribes did not have a class of people labelled "Teachers". It was the function of everyone to teach and learn.

There are many indications today that the whiteman's learned, elitist, educational "experts" are groping dimly to re-discover the idyllic educative system that once flourished on these shores before the arrival of the immigrant cultures.

(If there is any doubt about this, ask any student or educator if he would prefer to go to school or learn some other way. Invariably and without even describing "some other way", the student would choose it, and the educator would first want to define "some other way" before also choosing it.)

In the world as it was, the education of Indian people was participative and dynamic and involving the total community, at every level of community life, every day, all day.

Education was a life-sustaining force and not what it has become for Indian people today - a series of technologically correct exercises that produce social disasters.

In the world as it was, education was integrated into the fabric of the tribal community. It was not a segmentized, institutionalized, and closed system operated by professionals whose allegiance is to the perpetuation of the system itself, rather than to the total community which it was originally set out to serve.

In the world as it was, the education process served the people, the people did not serve the system.

The World As It Is

In the world as it is, the present Canadian education system does not serve the Indian people, nor is their traditional system fully operative. The results of this are tragic!

In the world as it is, the Indian students have a drop-out rate (over 90% in the high school and over 60% in elementary school) that, if applied to the white population, would have the white parents up in arms demanding immediate reform and a complete overhaul of the educational system. And they would get it!!

In the world as it is, most Indian people 35 years and over have very little education or no schooling at all.

In the world as it is, the lack of education compounds the problems . . .

. . . of unemployment (over 58% of Indian people are unemployed),

. . . of lack of constructive outlets (over 40% of inmates in penal institutions are Indian people.

. . . of poor health (life expectancy of Indian people is much lower than the Canadian average, infant mortality rate is nearly double the national rate,

. . . of social and family disability (excessive use of alcohol is rampant among Indian people, family and child-abandonment is a growing concern, illegitimacy and separation increases the numbers of single-parent, female heads of families),

. . . of discrimination and prejudice (instead of Indian and white people meeting on a common-ground of mutual acceptance, they meet increasingly in individual and group encounters that portend future hostile confrontations),

. . . of personal alienation and group disgust (the schools must realize the students who drop-out today, or who are pushed-out or shoved-out, become the problem-child of the other social institutions and the price paid by the Indian people in the loss of self-esteem, and by white people in increased costs is virtually immeasureable. No one complains when the cost of maintaining one Indian in jail for one year is $10,000., but loudly wail when the cost of educating one Indian rises slightly over $1,000.).

The schools, instead of bridging the gap between white and Indian are increasing it.

There may be more single individual Indians in levels of higher education today, but the majority in relative terms are lagging farther behind.

In the world as it is, the Indian people are being ill-served by the present education system to which they are subjected.

This accounts for the trend Indian people express to exercise greater control over their own education system.

In the world as it is, the education of Indian people has been termed as "education for failure".

What a sad commentary on the state of the civilization of this country!! The civilization that set out to civilize savages!

The World As We Want It To Be

The difficulty in producing Indian teachers for Indian schools, or white teachers for Indian schools, or Indian teachers for white schools, is not a lack in the techniques, or the "how" this can be done, but in the attitudes and beliefs that exist in the white peoples' minds (and have now been engendered in some Indian peoples' minds), that Indians are inherently uneducable or so pronounced in savagery as to be unredeemable.

These ideas persist so strongly they are used to justify the unjustifiable; the violation of the educational philosophies and principles that underly the educational foundations of the white man's own educational system.

These principles can be summarized in the statement used by pedagogues when talking to the peasants:

"Start where the student is!"

"Go from the known to the unknown!"

In the attempts at education of the Indian people, the educators have, in fact, started where the Indian student isn't or wasn't, and proceeded from the unknown to the unknown.

Then, in attempting to discover what was wrong, instead of asking:

"What is wrong with our system?" or

"What is wrong with our methods?"

the educators proceed to ask,

"What is wrong with those damn dumb Indians?"

This question continues to be asked by the white teachers in our Indian schools today, and especially by the white teachers in the white schools the Indians attend today.

That is why, in the world as it is, the education of Indian people in this country is so dismal. That is why it has been characterized as "education for failure".

And that is why it is necessary to have the Indian people determine in large part the shape of the educational world as we want it to be.

In the world as we want it to be, the teachers . . .

. . . will be of the particular tribe they are teaching,

. . . will be thoroughly knowledgeable about the past and present of the particular community in which they teach,

. . . will be thoroughly knowledgeable about the past and present of the particular tribe they teach,

. . . will be thoroughly knowledgeable about the past and present of the other tribes in this country,

. . . will be knowledgeable about the past and present of the immigrant peoples of this country,

. . . will be knowledgeable about the peoples and cultures of other countries and other lands,

. . . will be fluently bilingual and specially trained in teaching a second language, whether English or French,

. . . will use the particular community, including its people, as a daily source and resource to the school,

. . . will recognize that the school is of the community, to be used by the community.

In the world as we want it to be, the teachers, particularly if they are white, will think of Indian people as people, who are as

educable and as thirsty for knowledge as any other people can be.

In the world as we want it to be, the teachers will think of themselves as people, whose role it is to stimulate, to agitate other people to the full use of their faculties, and will not set themselves up as the accumulators and infallible purveyors of all the past wisdom of all the past ages.

In the world as we want it to be, the teachers will learn how to deal in ideas, ideals, emotions, cultural differences, individual pacing, mind-stimulation and soul-searching. The human person is not only an intellectual being, but a spiritual being, and the schools must serve the student's soul as well as his mind.

In the world as we want it to be, the teachers will teach . . .

. . . how to learn,

. . . how to think,

. . . how to ACT!

In the world as we want it to be, the Teacher Training Institutions . . .

. . . will immediately allow into their halls Indian people from the educational continuum of the illiterate to the possessor of a graduate degree who show the skill, ability, and aptitudes to become teachers,

. . . will actively recruit such Indian people,

. . . will develop techniques to allow the Indians' own mastery of knowledge-gaining and knowledge-spreading to be used in the training of teachers,

. . . will create special agencies or work in conjunction with existing

or projected Indian institutions to develop a method and philosophy of education amenable and adaptable to Indian perspectives,

. . . will, if necessary, leave teacher training of Indian people, or for Indian people, to Indian people, if the Institution's existing mandates are so inflexible as to disallow experimentation, diversity, and innovation,

. . . will examine their code of "professionalism" in relation to "qualifications" to allow the Indian people to make up for the long years of educational lag because they were considered uneducable.

In the world as we want it to be, the teachers will be taught, and will be taught how to teach, that knowledge, and the pursuit of it, is what the school is about.

In the world as we want it to be, the teachers will be taught to begin where the student is! and to go from the known to the unknown! To do this, the teacher must know what is known to the Indian student. This might be taught in Teacher Training Institutions but not likely. It can best be done in the community.

It can be done by having the people of the community participate in the activities of the school.

Modern technology makes possible the recording (records, tapes, VTR) of the spoken word and visual images. It must be recognized Indian culture is a non-literate culture -- an oral culture. And that the preservers of that culture are the elders. Their knowledge should be recorded in some form in order to preserve the legends, beliefs and accounts of the past, so their descendents can know who they are today, in order to survive tomorrow.

The teachers will be taught that Indian students are not the descendents of the Druids or the Norman Vikings, but are the descendents of Tecumseh, Poundmaker and our own tribal forefathers.

The teachers will be taught that Indian students are of this land, Canada; not as it is, but as it was, and as we want it to be.